DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 865 FL 801 169

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TITLE	"The Cutting Edge," El Paso Community College's Workplace Education Program. Final Evaluation Report for the 1993-1995 Cycle.
INSTITUTION	Learning Partnerships, East Brunswick, NY.
PUB DATE	25 Aug 95
NOTE	31p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; College Outcomes Assessment; Community Colleges; Cooperation; Curriculum Design; *English (Second Language); Federal Aid; Inplant Programs; *Literacy Education; Organizational Communication; *Outcomes of Education; Program Design; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *School Business Relationship; Second Language Programs; Staff Development; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational English (Second Language); *Workplace Literacy
IDENTIFIERS	El Paso Community College TX

ABSTRACT

The report summarizes results of an evaluation of "The Cutting Edge," a workplace education program operated by El Paso Community College (Texas) with funding from the National Workplace Literacy Program. The project had tow main goals: to field test and refine curricula at a number of workplace sites, and to prepare products and services and mechanisms for disseminating them. Achievements included: field testing that reached 72 percent of learners called for, despite several unforeseen obstacles, and preparation and dissemination of 144 hours of basic skills learning modules, 144 hours of communication modules, 15 hours of math modules, and 6 teacher training videotapes. The report also describes key program components, including curricula, mechanisms to facilitate communication with partners, coordination of program components, assessment mechanisms that emphasize dialogue between partners, staff development practices, and dissemination efforts. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Final Evaluation Report for the 1993-1995 Cycle of "The Cutting Edge," El Paso Community College's Workplace Education Program

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Executive Summary

From information gathered at three points in 1994 and 1995, the evaluator prepared this report about the 1993-1995 cycle of "The Cutting Edge," the workplace education program operated by El Paso Community College with funding from the National Workplace Literacy Program. Summarized below are the evaluator's findings and recommendations:

Project goals

Project staff focused on two major goals:

- To field-test and refine curricula in a number of workplace sites.
- To prepare a number of products and services -- and mechanisms for disseminating them -- once the federal funding ended.

These goals were appropriate, in keeping with the research-and-development purpose of the federal grant.

What was achieved

Field-testing: A number of factors (including reductions in project staff and non-education-related changes going on within field-site companies) made field-testing difficult. Nonetheless, EPCC staff persisted. They became more "customer-oriented," asking sites what they needed. Staff then designed new curricula, revised curricula developed under previous federal grants, trained instructors, and implemented instruction (including shorter-term "seminars") purposely geared more closely to the interests (e.g., "TQM") and time constraints of host sites. This field-testing reached approximately 72 percent of the learners called for in the proposal, a commendable number given the limited time which the companies appeared willing to give to employee education.

Dissemination: EPCC has essentially met the goals of preparing 144 hours of Basic Skills modules and 144 hours of Communications modules, with accompanying videos and instructional guides. Staff also prepared 15 hours of math modules and a series of six teacher-training videotapes. Staff have been disseminating these products via conference

presentations, by writing the model into other proposals, via electronic listserves, and by institutionalizing the model in the College's new Literacy and Workforce Development Center. The project's largest corporate partner has also adopted many of the elements of the project model into the corporate education strategy being implemented in their plants nationwide.

The quality of the products is high, based on extensive research and revisions; using video technology in innovative ways; and providing a user-friendly, flexible format adaptable by instructors to various contexts. The dissemination mechanisms are also outstanding in their variety and in the likelihood that they will enable the field to learn from the project's valuable experience.

Key program components

Curriculum: EPCC has developed high-quality, innovative curricula geared to the evolving needs of U.S. workplaces. The curricula are in keeping with research done in the field sites and elsewhere in the adult education and workplace education fields. The curricula also use video technologies in innovative ways.

EPCC's experience showed the need for the full range of stakeholders to be involved in the curriculum development process. EPCC responded to that need by creating a curriculum process which places control for the learning process in the hands of instructors and learners. It encourages them -- with other stakeholders -- to figure out what needs to be learned, bring in literacy tasks and materials to focus on, and monitor progress in thoughtful ways. This was a conscious shift away from a more-traditional perspective which views curriculum as a series of prepackaged lessons.

Communication with partners (site development): The project underscored the need for mechanisms (e.g., a site coordinator and planning team) to facilitate clear communication among project stakeholders. Such mechanisms enable all to have input in goal-setting and in the design, implementation, and monitoring of project activities. This ensures that the project is responsive to changing site needs and conditions and that stakeholders stay invested in the project.

Stakeholders must also recognize, however, that companies and unions are under pressure from other non-

education factors which can distract stakeholders from giving the attention required to create and sustain a high quality education program. This suggests that education providers have procedures and authority to assess stakeholder readiness to participate in a workplace education project and, if that readiness doesn't exist, to withdraw from that site.

Coordination of program components: The project demonstrated the need for education providers to have one or more staff with the expertise and time to coordinate and support the many components of an effective workplace education program. Such coordination also requires a collaborative structure to facilitate decision-making among education staff members.

Assessment: EPCC staff put great emphasis on developing a variety of assessment mechanisms which emphasize dialogue between learners and facilitators and which merge assessment with learning. These tools, organized in portfolios, enabled learners and facilitators to reflect on learner goals and progress and shape learning activities accordingly. Such mechanisms, however, require facilitators interested and able to use them.

Future such projects might borrow from these learner portfolio tools and create similar mechanisms by which other stakeholders (e.g., managers, supervisors, and union representatives) can monitor whether and how learners are transferring what they learned back to the job.

Staff development: The project put great emphasis on staff development, relying heavily on staff meetings and on-the-job involvement in developing and trying out new ideas. The project showed the value of careful selection of staff and of providing the supports needed to ensure continuity of staff and, thereby, continuous improvement of practices. Education providers should develop clear strategies for staff development to enable staff to create an internal "learning team" which mirrors the kind of learning they are promoting at the site level.

Dissemination: EPCC staff have put together not only high-quality products to disseminate but a number of mechanisms for disseminating them once the federal grant ends. This emphasis on dissemination is in keeping with the research-

and-development purpose of the federal grant and is relatively unique in the workplace education field.

Introduction

From May 1994 through August 1995, outside evaluator Paul Jurmo monitored progress of the El Paso Community College workplace education program. He did so by collecting information via interviews, focus groups, and reviews of project documents and videotapes during visits to project sites in May 1994 and January-February 1995 and subsequent long-distance communications with project representatives in the summer of 1995.

In those first two rounds of data-gathering, the evaluator emphasized the "formative" aspect of the evaluation, serving as a facilitator of planning, self-evaluation, and program improvement. After the May 1994 and January-February 1995 site visits, he prepared reports which summarized for EPCC staff his findings and recommendations.

This final report builds on the initial and interim reports (available from EPCC), to provide answers to the following questions:

Questions to be answered
in the
final phase of the evaluation

1. What are the goals/objectives the project was trying to accomplish?

2. To what extent have those goals been met?

3. What other unanticipated outcomes have emerged?

4. For key program components, what were the strengths and limitations? (That is, what helped and what hindered progress toward desired goals?)

5. What "lessons" might El Paso Community College and others in the workplace education field (including the funder, the U.S. Department of Education) learn from this project, to guide their future work in this field?

Information collected
and
evaluator's interpretations

Question #1: What are the goals/objectives the project was trying to accomplish?

What the sources indicated:

The project appeared to be trying to accomplish two key goals. These might be termed "direct service provision/field-testing" and "dissemination." In fact, these two purposes have always been focal points of the EPCC program since it first began receiving federal funds. However, relative greater emphasis is now being placed on the "dissemination" goal, for two reasons:

1. The project is now winding down its third and final funding cycle. Now is the time to pull together all of what the project has learned and produced, so that it can be disseminated to the field.

2. A number of factors internal and external to EPCC have made it difficult to provide direct services during this cycle:

- Internally, several key EPCC staff (including the project director, a curriculum developer, and two field coordinators) left the project at a point when sites needed to be developed. These staff changes inhibited start-up of field sites for this round of funding.

- Externally, the participating companies and labor organization experienced a good deal of change and pressures which distracted them from placing priority on starting classes at a time appropriate for EPCC or continuing the classes once they were underway. In some cases, companies had also already used EPCC materials for some time and were looking for other types of curricula to provide to their workers. (In many cases, workers and management said they preferred instruction which was not tied too specifically to particular job tasks. EPCC's earlier

materials were associated -- rightly or wrongly -- with a job-specific focus.)

Given these internal and external impediments to the original plan for further field-testing of the EPCC curriculum, mid-way through this cycle of funding project staff set the following goals for themselves for the remainder of the project:

1. Direct service provision/field-testing: Wherever possible, staff would try to implement as many classes as possible in order to further field-test the full range of curriculum materials with as many learners as possible. (The original proposal said the project would try to reach 600 students.) This would depend, however, on the readiness of local companies to use the EPCC curriculum during the remaining months of the project cycle.

2. Dissemination: Staff would put extra energy into refining and expanding existing materials in order to have polished curriculum packages and organizing procedures to disseminate at the end of the project cycle. Dissemination would be not only to external audiences but internally within the College with the hope that EPCC would continue using versions of the Cutting Edge model even after federal funding ran out.

Evaluator's interpretations:

In this cycle of project funding, EPCC staff were faced with a difficult situation. In keeping with the purposes of the National Workplace Literacy Program, EPCC was trying to both field-test and wrap up curricula for dissemination at a time when (1) EPCC staff had been suddenly reduced when several key members resigned to take other jobs and (2) potential sites were not particularly ready to implement the kinds of basic skills instruction offered by EPCC.

Faced with these obstacles, the remaining EPCC staff reorganized itself, analyzed the situation, and chose a reasonable strategy of (1) doing as much field-testing as they could in the sites willing to participate as test sites and (2) focusing heavily on fine-tuning of the considerable materials already developed (under three cycles of federal funding) and preparing mechanisms to disseminate those curricula. This increased emphasis on

dissemination was appropriate and in keeping with the federal guidelines. It was a realistic response to a situation in which -- for many reasons -- corporate and labor partners were not particularly ready to invest the time required to make good use of the EPCC curricula.

Question #2: **To what extent have those goals been met?**

What the sources indicated:

Direct service provision/field-testing

Early in this cycle, EPCC staff were troubled by declines in the number of sites where field-testing could be done and in the numbers of students within those sites which did participate. The reasons for these lower-than-hoped-for numbers are many but can be broken down into the "internal" and "external" factors referred to above.

Midway through the grant period, EPCC staff acknowledged this decline in "numbers" and developed a new strategy which was, in many ways, more "customer-oriented." Staff asked the corporate customers what kinds of services they wanted from EPCC and learned that shorter-term "seminars" were generally preferred over longer-term "courses." This was due in part to (1) the turmoil which many plants were going through and in part to (2) the fact that most of the plants had already used the previous EPCC curricla for some time and were now looking for something different.

In response to this feedback, EPCC staff reorganized their curriculum into a mix of longer-term classes and shorter-term "seminars" of 1-3 hours each, with 12-28 learners in each seminar. Each seminar focused on issues of particular interest to the plant.

By the end of the project cycle, the following activities had been carried out: (More-detailed figures are available from EPCC.)

Classes:

- Workplace English: 5 classes begun, with 20 of 37 students completing the course (54% retention).
- Workplace Basics: 10 classes begun, with 45 of 72 students completing the course (63% retention).
- Workplace Communications: 9 classes begun, with 34 of 44 students completing the course (77% retention).
- Of the total of 24 classes begun, 6 were cancelled due to non-attendance by students.

Seminars: A total of 13 seminars were provided (9 at Levi-Strauss plants and 4 at Baxter Convertors), with a total of 281 learners completing the seminars.

Total numbers . . .

. . . of learners reached in the 18 classes and 13 seminars was 434 or 72% of the 600 cited in the original proposal.

. . . of contact hours was 6550.

. . . of sites which hosted seminars or classes was 10 (6 at Levi-Strauss plants and one each at East-West Apparel, Sara Lee, Baxter Convertors, and the Rio Grande Workers Alliance).

Feedback from these field-tests was, whenever, possible, incorporated into whatever subsequent revisions EPCC staff made in the curriculum modules. EPCC report that participants' feedback about the classes and seminars was generally very favorable. Comments emphasized the value of instruction which enable learners to focus on hands-on, practical applications.

EPCC staff said that the above figures indicate that the plants weren't ready to send students to "classes" but were more willing to send them to shorter-term seminars. The companies were willing to provide release time for the seminars, but generally required learners to go to the classes on their own time. EPCC staff said this showed the value of paying attention to what stakeholders say they want and can do and of being willing to revise formats and content accordingly. It also indicated that no one format (i.e., short-term seminar vs. longer-term course) was suited to all situations. That is, if a company had a specific need which could be met through a short seminar, then such a format was appropriate. If the goal was longer-term development of a broader array of knowledge and skills, then a course (or series of courses, etc.) would be more suitable.

EPCC staff noted that those learners who stuck with the classes on their own time tended to be a "special breed" of highly-motivated workers. These learners were intent on going on to college and improving their situations, even if it meant coming on their own time and having to work around demands for overtime. This motivation made it easier for instructors to teach and to retain students. Unfortunately, the flip side of this phenomenon was the many workers who didn't have the motivation dropped out, and thus didn't gain much from the program.

Dissemination

EPCC staff have in this grant period revised existing Basic Skills curricula and prepared new Communications curricula and field-tested them in the sites described above. These field-tests have been useful for curriculum development purposes, as they have provided important feedback which has allowed curriculum development staff to make valuable changes.

As of August 1995 , 144 hours of Basic Skills lessons (in modular format with readings and twenty videotapes) and 144 hours of Communications lessons had been produced. (No videos were produced for the Communications course because lessons were structured to have learners make their own videos rather than rely on prepackaged videos prepared by EPCC staff, as had been the case in the Basic Skills and English classes.)

Staff also produced approximately 15 modules for math instruction, although only one of them was actually used (with positive results). In addition to these "products" (which will eventually be available for broad dissemination), the staff has produced many valuable lessons about the "how's" of creating meaningful workplace education.

EPCC staff are compiling these lessons in a series of six teacher-training videotapes. These tapes will be accompanied by a curriculum guide. Staff are planning for a number of presentations in the coming year at conferences within and outside of Texas in which they will further disseminate this curriculum model.

EPCC was not able to produce a supplemental guide for small businesses, as specified in the grant proposal.

Another important dissemination activity has been the institutionalization of the program in the new Literacy and Workforce Development Center being established by the College. An experienced member of the Cutting Edge program staff has now taken a job as coordinator for workplace training. She will incorporate materials and learnings from the three cycles of federal funding into her new job of providing relevant education services to area companies. She and the Cutting Edge's curriculum developer (who is also staying on at the College working with the state consortium for workplace education) will also be on call to respond to queries from outside El Paso about the Cutting Edge program.

The largest corporate partner in this project, Levi-Strauss, also made large investments (and continues to invest) in worker education, at least in part due to the experience they had with this project in their El Paso plants. Levi has purchased many of the EPCC curriculum materials and videos and has used EPCC staff as trainers of their own education staff and, in a number cases, has hired EPCC staff to operate employee education activities.

Evaluator's interpretations:

EPCC staff have thoughtfully analyzed their three cycles of workplace education experience and are unusual among federally-funded programs in their attention to revision and dissemination of their experience and products.

They have produced many useful products (sample curricula and assessment tools, and guidelines for various components of a workplace education program) for the field and have put in place mechanisms for further use (within and outside El Paso) of the materials and lessons produced under three cycles of federal funding.

Question #3. What other unanticipated outcomes have emerged?

What the sources indicated:

Many of the lessons produced by the EPCC project have come "the hard way." Through trial and error in the field, the project has shown how difficult it is to (1) customize a basic skills curriculum which is meaningful to the many stakeholders represented at a worksite and (2) implement even a well-designed curriculum in a continually-changing workplace context. Staff have, however, also shown that, despite such difficulties, such customization and implementation of curricula are possible if educators are creative, flexible, and persistent. These lessons are outlined under Questions #4 and 5 below.

Evaluator's interpretations:

The EPCC project is unique in the workplace education field in the amount and kinds of experience it has produced. While that experience has not always been easy, it contains many valuable lessons for others to learn from. By documenting how they have continually revised their practice over the half-dozen years of federally-funded work, staff can make a valuable contribution to the field. This is especially important at a time when investment in such research-and-development projects appears jeopardized.

Questions #4 and #5: For key program components, what were the strengths and limitations? (That is, what helped and what hindered progress toward desired goals?) And what "lessons" might El Paso Community College and others in the workplace education field (including the funder, the U.S. Department of Education) learn from this project, to guide their future work in this field?

Curriculum

What the sources indicated:

Information about the EPCC "curriculum" came from several sources, including EPCC staff and documents and representatives of the companies where field-testing was occurring:

What EPCC staff and project documents indicated: A review of EPCC curriculum materials revealed that EPCC has produced a wide array of types and levels of materials which draw on whole-language theory and procedures and use video technology in unique ways. The curriculum can be broken down into the "Workplace English" (entry-level ESL), "Workplace English" (more-advanced level ESL), and "Workplace Communications" (oral and written English geared toward problem-solving, teamwork, and other aspects of a "Total Quality management" environment.)

Over the three cycles of this project, staff continually revised and expanded on this large, multi-level curriculum. At the end of this third cycle, staff have now clearly articulated a philosophy and developed plans for other practitioners which are clear, concise, and provide a user-friendly framework which allows for instructor creativity and flexibility.

The more-recent Communications course appears particularly well-suited to a "TQM" environment, as it places more control of the learning process in the hands of the learning teams themselves. For example, in the Communications course, learners now make their own videotapes rather than rely on tapes supplied to them by professional media specialists at EPCC. The focal points of the Communications course are also less specific to particular job tasks. Instead, they help learners to understand broader workplace themes and to work in teams to find information and make decisions. These are the competencies required in a team, quality-oriented environment.

The Communications curriculum was designed to be very flexible in nature, providing a framework into which an instructor could plug examples, problems, language taken from current contexts in which learners operate. This format encourages learners to take ownership for the learning activities rather than wait and be handed pre-packaged lessons by their teacher.

This flexible format was seen by EPCC staff as not only valid from a learning-theory perspective, but for practical reasons. As one staffer said:

The big money is gone. We don't have the luxury of creating highly plant-specific curriculum based on meticulous, time-consuming, laborious task analysis. This just isn't cost effective. In addition, the character of jobs is changing before our very eyes. Old style functional context curricula can be out of date in a very short time.

Furthermore, workers likely won't stay in one job very long either. Curriculum that is too specific won't help workers become flexible, adaptable, analytical lifelong learners who use effective strategies. More-flexible curriculum, coupled with effective staff training, will allow instructors to weave current needs into the lessons.

In essence, curriculum that's designed as a framework allows instructors to do on-the-spot, in-class task and needs analysis. (I like to call this "just-in-time" curricula.) Simply, it just makes more sense.

EPCC staff reinforced these observations in their explanations that, over its three funding cycles, the project curriculum has evolved significantly. In addition to the three levels of language-skills curricula outlined above, staff also produced a series of math lessons based on the same theme-based instuctional approach used in the "English" classes.

Staff also developed alternative delivery systems, including (in this last funding cycle) use of short-term "seminars" rather than longer-term "courses." This was done to respond to companies' time limitations. Over the three cycles, the content of the curricula shifted from an early focus on relatively narrow contextualized uses seen in particular jobs to broader, transferrable competencies useful in a number of job- and non-job contexts.

These changes have come with changes in curriculum development personnel, with experience (trial and error, listening to feedback from the sites) in this project, with study of what others are doing in the field, and through thoughtful analysis by project staff.

Even with all that experience and fine-tuning, the curriculum is not "perfect" in the sense of meeting all stakeholder expectations.

This problem is difficult to respond to. For example:

> . . . While some instructors readily take to using the various curricula, others don't easily do so.
> . . . Some pieces of the curriculum (e.g., the Communications course) appear to be more popular with learners than other pieces (which many learners seem to feel are too job-specific).
> . . . . Most of the agreed-upon field-site companies appear to not be making much effort to use the full range of curricula being produced by the EPCC staff. In a number of cases, classes were cancelled due to non-attendance by employees.

EPCC staff tried to deal with the first two of these issues through staff training and supervision, and through constant revision of the curriculum to tap into learner motivations. The last issue was harder for EPCC to control, especially because EPCC lacked a full-time business coordinator who could negotiate with the companies to set up and sustain classes. A full-time coordinator might also focus directly on the question of why students drop out.

What a company representative indicated:

One company representative attributed the fact that companies don't readily make use of the good-quality EPCC curriculum to the fact that the companies have not thought through where basic education fits into the larger corporate strategy. He says that this confusion results in basic education not being integrated into the larger organizational culture.

This is a problem particularly acute in the sites where EPCC has operated. These sites have been undergoing many changes of personnel, policy, and procedures. The sites have often not taken the time to figure out how all of the changes being introduced -- including the EPCC classes -- fit together.

The result has been a curriculum which, while in many ways innovative and outstanding, is not being well used by the sites for which it was developed.

What an EPCC representative said:

One EPCC representative suggested that the project did not adequately analyze what the companies and workers really

needed before designing the curriculum. He noted that, rather than automatically seeing "curriculum" as "a course" (as is normally the way curriculum is defined in academic settings), curriculum might in fact be a number of learning opportunities (e.g., computer-assisted learning, one or more courses, short-term seminars) which are mutually-reinforcing. A learner taking advantage of such opportunities would produce a record of learning efforts which she/he could display when applying for a job promotion.

What company facilitators said:

Many facilitators said they saw the EPCC curricula as tools to be woven into other learning activities offered at the sites. Several sites seemed to have extensive, ongoing learning opportunities, including computer-assisted learning.

Evaluator's interpretations:

This experience underscores a lesson being learned in other workplace education efforts. "Curriculum development" cannot be done apart from "site development," the creation of a workplace culture which respects, values, and makes use of learning. You can't have one without the other.

As it now wraps up its "curriculum development approach" into a disseminatable model, EPCC should now also analyze what is needed to do "site development." This should be presented as a companion piece to any curriculum development guide or training video. (See the discussion of site development below under "Communication with partners [site development])."

The EPCC experience shows the potential value of the "workplace needs assessment" model which is being developed elsewhere in the field. This is a tool which educators can use to understand the larger context they are entering into, so they can design learning activities geared more directly to learner and organizational interests.

To be fair to EPCC staff, it should be noted that they have consistently done their best to get input from company representatives throughout the life of this project, too often to little avail. Curriculum developers then have had to rely on their

own experience and research from the reading and ESL fields to design what they consider to be sound methodology from an instructional theory perspective. However, because workplace education is as much (and perhaps more) about changing organizations as it is about changing individual workers, EPCC probably needs to pay as much attention to developing procedures for helping the companies create a learning culture as it does to creating curricula for helping workers learn in the classroom.

Part of those negotiations should include an investigation of why learners drop out or fail to attend regularly. By meeting privately with current and former learners, EPCC staff might get a clearer picture of what is inhibiting learners from participating; what their interests are; and how the program might be restructured to respond to their interests, needs, time constraints, and so forth.

Those interested in using the EPCC curricula in the future might also investigate more closely how the curricula can be linked to the computer-assisted learning opportunities now being set up by companies. Rather than seeing the EPCC classes and computer-assisted learning as separate entities, program planners might more consciously link the two activities. Learners might, for example, do graphs, reports, forms, self-assessments, and other Communications course materials on the computer.

Communication with partners (site development)

What the sources indicated:

What EPCC staff indicated: As noted above, EPCC staff have tried to understand company and learner needs and carefully negotiate to set up classes to respond to those needs. In some cases this has worked, at least for a short time (until company conditions change).

Companies seemed distracted, however, and in some ways to take the EPCC program for granted. Many of the companies don't provide release time to workers to attend the program, something they had originally agreed to do. Some EPCC staff advised that, if companies don't support the program in the way they agreed to in the project proposal, then the education provider should have the flexibility to find other companies to work with. One staff

member suggested that, after a careful needs assessment, the College develop a proposal for a company which clearly states not only what the College can provide but what the company must provide, as well.

EPCC was hampered in the past year by a lack of a full-time, experienced business coordinator to carry out the necessary negotiations with companies.

EPCC staff were also limited by the guidelines they set for themselves in the funding proposal. Staff felt committed, for example, to produce certain types of curricula even when the companies were indicating -- directly or indirectly -- that those curricula no longer met the companies' needs or timelines. Later revisions of the curriculum, however, provided a more-flexible format and content which, staff now feel, instructors will be better able to adapt to the particular interests, time constraints, etc. of each site.

Some plants now seem to be learning from experience that the kind of education represented in the Communications course might be valuable to them. It appears that plants until now have often been operating on old paradigms/assumptions about the role of workers and worker education and thus weren't really prepared to make use of what EPCC was offering. At the same time, EPCC's thinking has evolved from a job-specific approach to a focus on broader, critical thinking and communication skills needed in team environments. There thus appears to be a potential for a confluence of new thinking from both the company and education sides of this relationship.

One EPCC representative responded to these frustrations with the following recommendations:

> *I think these NWLP projects became really unnatural and forced. Although many are bemoaning the demise of these grants, I think in some cases the big grants allowed industry to come to think of educators as "owing" them something. Since they didn't have to ante up any actual monetary commitment, many didn't take the project seriously.*
>
> *I think contract training has a lot of potential. We need to develop these relationships with more of a business mindset. We have to be businesspeople too. A big part of the equation is*

time and grade. If we build a good track record -- developing solid industry-based programs, implementing classes, showing concrete results -- business will come to us.

I despise the concept that we, as holy educators, must convince the big, bad businessman that his workers are illiterate and that they should let us come in and fix it. I think the relationship is stronger if the business comes to us. Then together we can hammer out a plan. Of course, it is incumbent upon us to develop accurate informational/promotional materials that give business a clear idea of our capabilities.

What company representatives said:

In the future, both education providers and companies need to more carefully examine what the organizations and workers need, rather than come in with the assumption that "education" will by itself change anything in a company. In a workplace trying to shift toward quality teams, workers need critical thinking skills, an understanding of concepts which might have traditionally been foreign to them, and specific skills like "making suggestions."

Curricula should focus on those specific and perhaps simple problems, and learners should work in teams to learn how to solve them. From there, the problems covered can become increasingly more difficult.

Companies should also consider what kind of incentives it can give to workers who do make the effort to develop new skills.

Workers need to let go of old attitudes about work and their role in the workplace. They need to get rid of the "it's not my job" attitude if they and the organization are going to make the transition to high performance.

What the labor representative said:

To involve workers, the needs assessments must also listen to what workers say they need. They usually come to adult education programs with specific goals in mind, such as qualifying for residency, preparing for layoffs, etc.

Evaluator's interpretations:

EPCC needed more flexibility to be able to respond quickly to company -- and learner -- needs as they emerged. But it was hard for EPCC to keep abreast of those needs without a business coordinator at EPCC and without a smooth structure in which company representatives could convey those needs to EPCC.

That structure should probably include something like a site-level planning committee with guidelines on how to continually identify organizational and individual learning needs, and plan, monitor, and revise appropriate learning activities. The committee should also come to a clear agreement about who is responsible for carrying out which tasks and providing which resources, and when those responsibilities would be fulfilled.

However, even with a business coordinator and a site-level planning structure in place, there is no guarantee that sites will buy into the kinds of services offered by EPCC. If management and workers are distracted by structural changes, market downturns, overtime, and other "non-education" factors -- and are unwilling to make the investment of time needed for good planning and instruction -- it will be difficult for them to make good use of even the best educational resources.

Coordination of program components

What the sources indicated:

Since the project director and business coordinator left last year, the project has been hampered by inadequate coordination of the various components (site development, assessment, curriculum development, staff development) important for such a project. While -- when those staff shortages became known -- the remaining project staff had hoped to get additional personnel to fill in those gaps, it did not get all the personnel it had hoped to.

Thus coordination of program activities has been shared in most of this project cycle among staff who have other duties (e.g., media production) to perform for the project. While that arrangement had certain benefits of building new expertise and better teamwork among staff members, some important tasks (e.g., hiring of staff, negotiating with field sites) haven't been

taken care of as they might have if a full-time project coordinator/director was on staff.

Evaluator's interpretations:

In this funding cycle, the project was hampered by a lack of a full-time coordinator. Existing staff had to be self-reliant through much of the cylce, and use regular staff meetings to make decisions needed to carry out and coordinate program activities.

If the project continues in the future under other auspices, care must be taken to ensure that adequate staff are in place to carry out the many administrative, outreach, curriculum development, assessment, and instructional tasks which such a project requires. There also needs to be a collaborative decision-making structure in place for coordinating the work of staff members.

Assessment system

What the sources indicated:

EPCC staff indicated that they have developed a number of innovative assessment procedures which some instructors have used and some haven't. These procedures emphasize interactive dialogue between learner and facilitator over "products" (e.g., tests) per se, and also stress a "seamless" merging of "assessment" with "learning." Procedures include (EPCC curriculum development staff can provide more details):

- Observation by facilitators during class.
- One-to-one reading and writing sessions in which learners and facilitators review strategies which learners use for reading and writing.
- Holistic writing assessments.
- Learner-written journals in which they record what they are reading and writing, what they like and don't like, etc.
- Videotaped interviews with learners at the end of a course, in which they respond to questions and thereby demonstrate mastery of particular strategies covered. Raters then assign a numerical value to each participant's performance, and the resulting figures are reported in aggregate form to business partners.

These tools and the resulting information would be assembled by learners and instructors into a portfolio for each learner.

One staff member noted that these tools tend to force the instructor to pay close attention to each learner, thereby becoming very sensitive to learner interests, progress, etc. This was something that reliance on more-traditional measures (e.g., standardized tests) couldn't do.

Another staff member said that the videotaped assessments and observation check lists were well used in the Communications classes because the instructors involved were "up for trying new ideas and wanted to give good feedback."

One staff member also pointed out the rich feedback which student journals provided about how learners were using what they learned. This anecdotal information was valuable even if not necessarily presented in simple quantifiable format.

The same staffer also stressed the need to have assessment tools which correlated closely with what was being taught in the classes. She felt that a participatory, whole-language instructional approach required interactive assessment activities which mirrored, reinforced, and produced information about what was going on in instruction.

Despite the potential benefits of such procedures, some facilitators use these procedures while some don't. This lack of instructor enthusiasm for using particular assessment tools could be due to several factors, including:

- Inadequate training or supervision for instructors.
- Instructor preference for more-traditional approaches (including a disregard for assessment) to assessment.
- Instructors' feeling that particular assessment procedures are too time-consuming and distracting from the "real" work of teaching and learning.
- Learners and instructors not seeing the relevance of particular job-specific lessons and thus not being interested in either the course content or in assessing what was going on in the course.

One EPCC representative noted that portfolio assessment is something developed in school settings where students and teachers have much more time to collect and analyze artifacts than do facilitators and learners in workplace education settings. She advised that, if portfolio assessment is to be used in a workplace setting, then those involved have to be very selective about the amount and types of artifacts to be collected.

Another noted that the same is true for all other assessment activities, especially when instruction is presented in short-term seminar format. It is not reasonable, she said, to expect learners and facilitators to spend the little time available on assessment activities when so little time can be given to instruction.

Staff admit that little has been done to assess whether and how learners transfer what is learned in class back to the job. (Managers were asked in questionnaires to give general feedback on their satisfaction with the seminars and classes and did so. However, although managers were also asked to go the next step of monitoring whether and how learners were using what they learned back at work, they generally didn't take the time to do so.) One staffer noted that, for this monitoring of transfer to happen, employers would have to devote time to gathering data out on the floor or in company records; however-- especially in the past year -- employers generally have not been willing to give any significant time to program planning or monitoring.

Evaluator's interpretations:

EPCC staff are to be commended for the creativity and persistence they have shown in continually developing assessment tools for workplace education settings. Most of those tools focus on gathering information related to the question of "how well are learners learning what is being taught in the classroom?" The resulting information tends to be packaged in language useful for learners and instructors.

However, there are other dimensions of program impact (e.g., "How well are learners using this back on the job, and what does this mean for the organization?") which have not been given the attention they deserve. This is the type of information which managers and supervisors are probably most interested in.

EPCC staff have tried to use questionnaires and other mechanisms to get feedback from supervisors and others about these questions, but those tools have often not been very useful. (For example, many supervisors rush through the questionnaires, checking off responses without giving a lot of thought, as if they are "just another form to fill out.")

EPCC is now trying in one site to have supervisors and managers record observations of changed workplace behavior. If a site had an education planning team in place, information from such check sheets (or "logs") might be discussed in planning team meetings.

EPCC and other workplace educators should recognize that, although the kinds of creative assessment tools developed by the project might produce useful information for instructors and learners, there are other stakeholders who might want other kinds of evidence about program impact. A solid upfront workplace needs assessment can provide an education planning team with ideas about the kind of information they might collect over the life of the program. And a planning team structure can provide an audience and mechanism for presenting that information for use in meaningful ways.

Staff development

What the sources indicated:

EPCC staff indicated that they have tried to pay careful attention to staff development, via training, regular staff meetings, support materials, and supervision. Staff have also noted, however, that it is vital that a program carefully choose ("screen") who is to serve on a program's staff.

In this project, instructors need to be in tune with EPCC's philosophy and procedures used for instruction, site development, and assessment. Otherwise, too much miscommunication and perhaps conflict can result. Instructors also need to be able to deal with the particular challenges (e.g., changing personnel, changing schedules, multiple stakeholders, multiple objectives) of workplace settings.

EPCC is also taking the extra step of developing a staff-development videotape series for dissemination after the project

is completed. This will, EPCC hopes, capture the lessons the project has learned about workplace education, along with the philosophy and methodology of the project.

Evaluator's interpretations:

EPCC is correct in emphasizing the need for good staff development. Few people -- in El Paso or elsewhere -- have ever worked in workplace education settings or with the collaborative, whole-language approach to adult learning used by EPCC. Staff thus have to be carefully selected, trained, supervised, and involved in program planning to ensure that staff are able to fully participate in and contribute to the project.

Despite some turnovers of staff during the three cycles of this project, EPCC did maintain several key staff members who "stuck" -- and "grew" -- with the project over time. This continuity of staff was vital, allowing the program to continually build on prior experience rather than to constantly be "reinventing wheels."

EPCC is to be commended for the amount of attention it has paid to staff development over the life of this project. This has been particularly challenging given the number of sites and instructors involved and the physical distance beween some sites.

The proposed staff-training videotape willl likely be another useful innovation. Staff might also consider linking sites via electronic mail, to allow instructors to share questions, strategies, and materials without the cost of travel, faxing, mail, telephone, etc.

EPCC might also broaden its definition of "staff" to include key company representatives. Such representatives might be included in the training given to EPCC instructors and/or they might have special training sessions of their own. (EPCC has done this in the past. It appears that such training for company representatives -- including learner representatives – has the potential of breaking down the communication gaps between educators and company personnel.)

Such interactions among instructors and/or company representatives are vital if the project is to itself take on the identity of a "learning team." In creating such a team, the project

would practice what it is preaching that companies should do: set up teams to continually plan, carry out, monitor, and improve operations. EPCC might learn from other multi-site projects (e.g., federally-funded projects being run by the New York State Education Department and the Massachusetts Department of Education) which are structuring themselves in similar ways.

Dissemination

What the sources indicated:

As noted above, EPCC staff have put extra energy into preparation of several products for dissemination at the end of the project. These include: revised versions of the Basic Skills and Communications curricula, a new 15-part math series, videotapes to accompany those curricula, and a teacher-training videotape.

Mechanisms have also been set up for EPCC to disseminate these products when current project staff go elsewhere after the project winds down. Individual project staff have also been making presentations at workplace education conferences and sharing ideas with other practitioners via various electronic listserves.

Two key staff members will remain at EPCC after the federal funds wind down and will in various ways disseminate the products and lessons from this project in their work in El Paso (including for the College's new Literacy and Workforce Development Center) and Texas and to other interested parties elsewhere.

Evaluator's interpretations:

Given the valuable lessons learned and materials produced by this project, it is appropriate for EPCC staff to emphasize dissemination in this final round of federal funding for the project. EPCC has had a well-qualified, creative, and committed video production and curriculum development staff in place to do so. Not only should "products" (e.g., video and print mateials) be disseminated, but "services" (consulting services, workshop presentations, sharing via the Internet) as well.

EPCC might take the time to prepare a written dissemination plan which clearly states the purposes, audiences, and mechanisms for

dissemination, along with a timeline for preparing and disseminating products and services.

It is likely that many adult educators now or potentially involved in workplace education would like to know more about the EPCC approach. EPCC needs to continue to track down those potential audiences and market its products.

The College -- especially through its new Literacy and Workforce Development Center -- should itself take care to support the creation of mechanisms for mailing out the materials in an efficient way. Perhaps the state-level workplace education consortium and/or a garment-industry trade association could also help with dissemination.

Beyond mailing out materials, making conference presentations, and incorporating project resources into the activities of the new EPCC Literacy and Workforce Development Center, dissemination might also be done through building the curriculum model into local economic development projects such as the Alameda Corridor Community Development Initiative or the worker education activities of the Rio Grande Workers Alliance. (RGWA is exploring a number of means of reaching out to local non-unionized workers, including setting up community-based adult education centers.)

Some version of the EPCC curriculum might also be disseminated over local community-access television (although the target population might lack the monthly fee needed to get access to cable TV).

The teacher-training videotape will likely be a useful tool for explaining the project's philosophy and methodologies.

EPCC staff might also consider disseminating the evaluator's reports and the kinds of information contained in the curriculum developer's January 1995 memo to the evaluator. (In that memo, the curriculum developer carefully mapped out the curriculum's philosophy and procedures, analyzed how that curriculum had been used, and described how she personally had come to use the curriculum.) Such documents might be edited into one or more technical notes focusing on particular topics (e.g., assessment, site

development, the personal experiences of project staff prior to and during the project).

EPCC might also collect and disseminate anecdotes which emerged from the classes, along with examples of student writing.

Because the math curriculum is something fairly unique for workplace education, EPCC staff should take special care to package and disseminate that curriculum, too.